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ABSTRACT

Serving as a "how-to" manual, this book includes historical and background information on the "Link for Learning" project in Hughes School District in eastern Arkansas, followed by a step-by-step approach to the development of a parent education project. The first part of the booklet describes the school and community, the growth and development of the project, and the project itself, whose goal is to link regular teachers, Chapter 1 teachers, and parents into a support network for Chapter 1 children. The book notes that the first full year of the project had a significant impact on Chapter 1 student achievement. The second part of the book describes the 5 steps for putting together a parent education project: (1) Assessing Your Resources; (2) Showing the Need; (3) Developing a Rationale; (4) Planning the Project; and (5) Implementing the Project. A step-by-step outline for implementing a project, a checklist for holding a meeting with parents, and a list of sources of information are attached. (RS)

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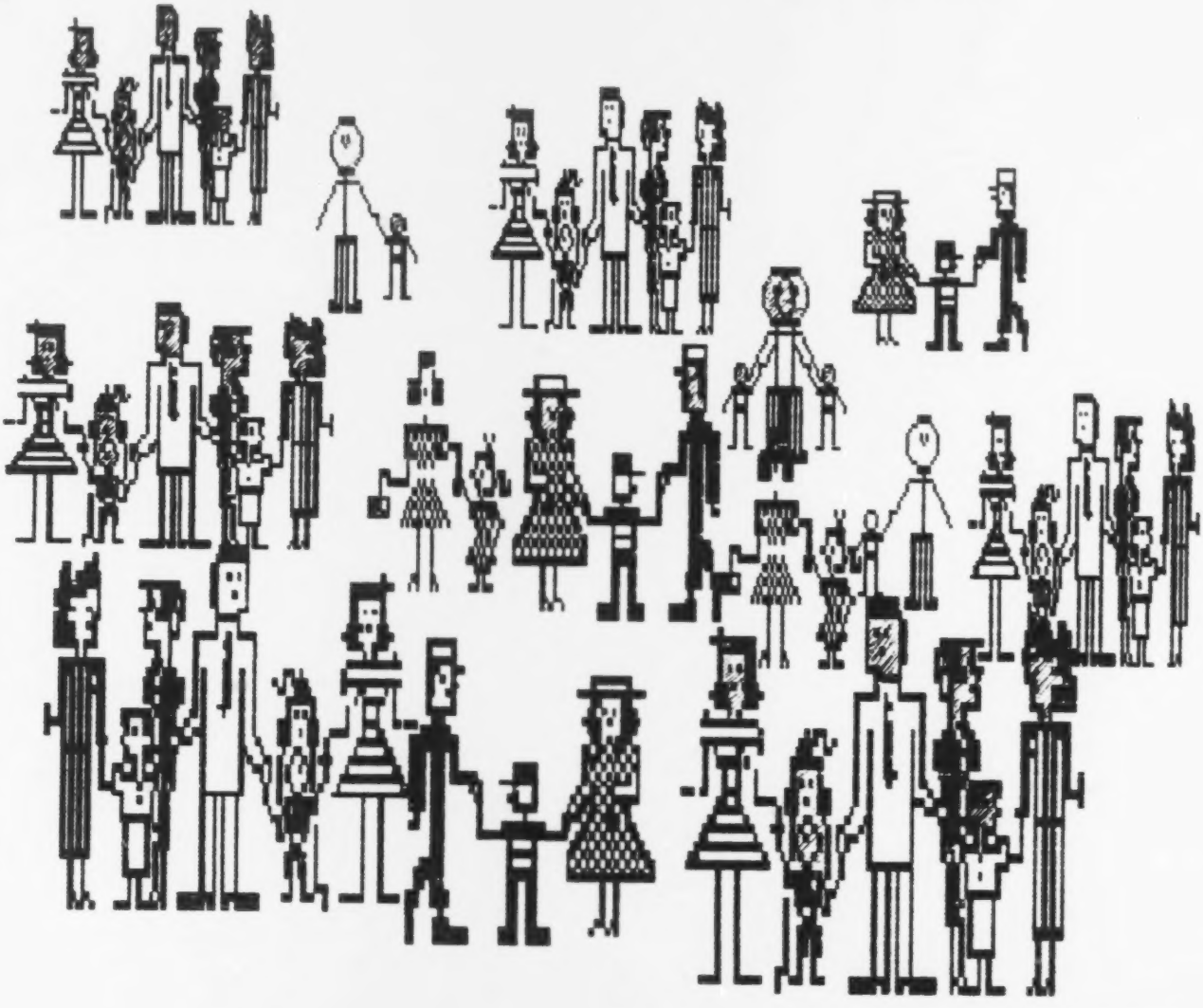

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HUGHES PUBLIC SCHOOLS

LINK for LEARNING

Hughes Public Schools
P.O. Box 9
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Superintendent's Message

As we strive to provide the best educational program possible for our young people, it is important that we all work together. Our parents are the first teachers their children know; therefore, it is important that they be able to provide the encouragement and help that their children need to be successful in school. When the children see that parents are supportive of the school programs, they will try to achieve at a high level.

It is the responsibility of the school through the parent education program to provide the understanding and help for parents that allows them to help their children. The school can do this by making parents aware of policy, homework, and techniques, and by letting them know that someone really does care.

All of our staff have worked to make the Link for Learning Program a success. I would like to commend each one who has worked in this effort. The young people of our school district are the winners.

Nelson Wall

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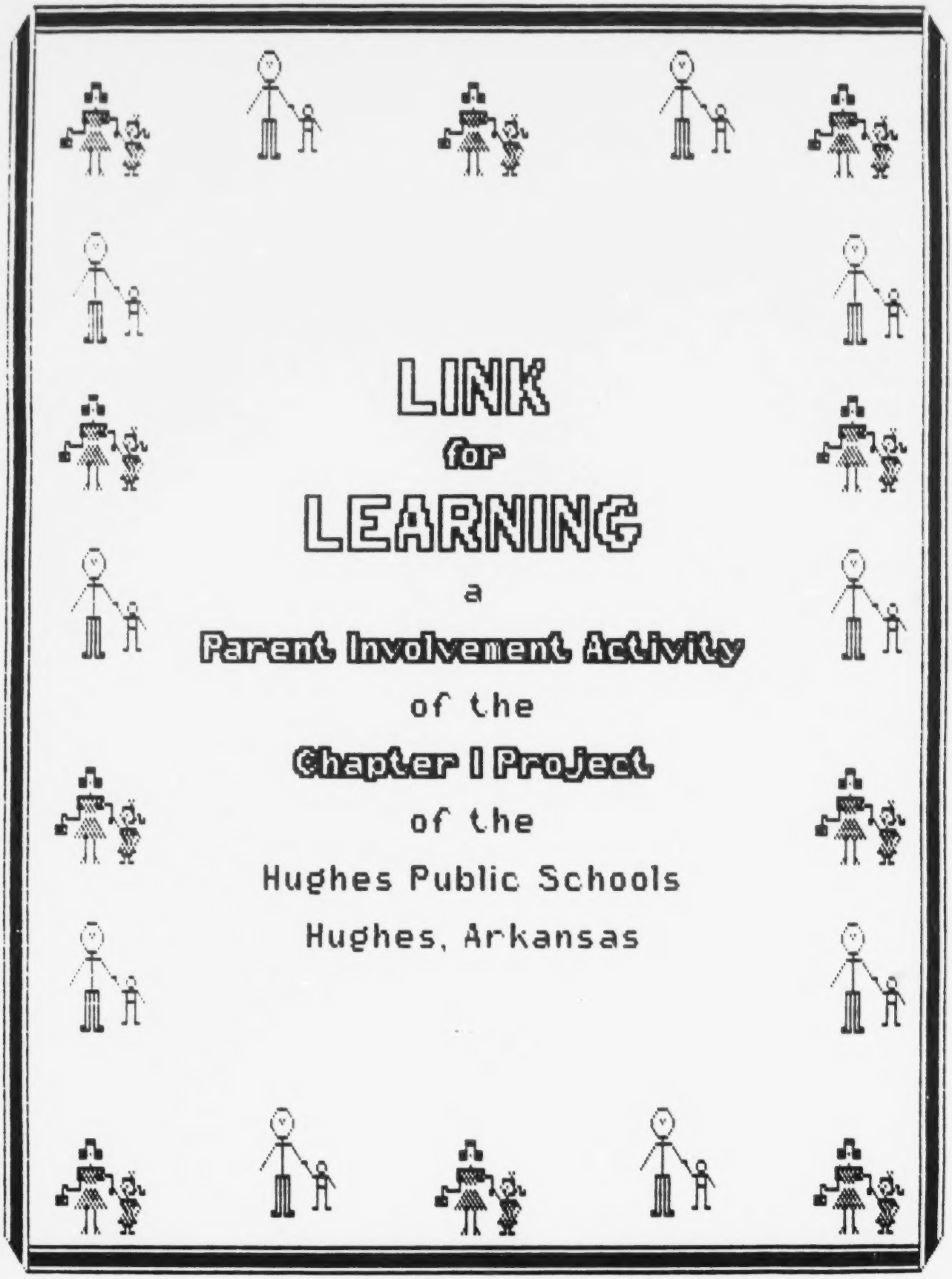

LINK
for
LEARNING

a

Parent Involvement Activity

of the

Chapter I Project

of the

Hughes Public Schools

Hughes, Arkansas

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Foreword

The Link for Learning Project was developed through the leadership of the Chapter I Office of the Arkansas Department of Education during the tenure of Clearence Lovell, Associate Director for Federal Programs. Jo Cheek, who is now the State NDN Facilitator and who was the Chapter I Program Advisor under whom the fledgling project grew and gained recognition, was an encourager, the likes of which every program coordinator should be privileged to have. Our present advisor, Arlen Jones, has continued the cooperation that makes our project possible. Originally created as an innovative project in Chapter I, Link for Learning has proven to be an asset to the Chapter I children for whom it was designed and to the entire community in which it operates.

Help for the project represented in this booklet has come from many sources. Our state's Chapter II office has made the application of effective schools research a reality in local school districts and through that effort has provided us with insight and information related to parent involvement. Shelli Billig, Director of Region 5 Rural Technical Assistance Center in Denver, Colorado, has provided help to us which includes some of the material in our presentation packet. Perhaps, as much as to each of the individual sources of assistance, we must give credit to the spirit of sharing and cooperation that exists among the educators in the state of Arkansas and to the eagerness of these educators to improve services to all our children.

No parent involvement project can survive at the local level without the support of the school board, the superintendent, the administration, the teachers, and certainly not without the parents and the children of the project. Link for Learning has had the greatest support possible from all these entities. Not only has our superintendent allowed us to proceed, he has attended almost every meeting that we've held. At the school level, the administrators have worked tirelessly to cooperate in every way that they could from scheduling to physical accommodations to participation in the programs. Teachers have responded enthusiastically, children have encouraged attendance and performed for parents, and above all parents have come to meetings and have worked with us as we have taken each shaky step toward a common goal. That goal is to link Chapter I, the regular classroom, and parents into a support network for Chapter I children.

It is because of the cooperation of all the groups mentioned above that the Link for Learning project has been termed successful and has been given recognition beyond the local level. Each time a team presents the project, whether it be at the International Reading Association's conference in Las Vegas, Nevada, or across the state of Arkansas as a recipient of a School Recognition Grant, those who are privileged to be on the team are few representing many. To those who make up the "many," the Chapter I project of the Hughes School District says, "Thanks, we appreciate your continuing support. We couldn't make it without you."

Linda Estes
Federal Coordinator

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Introduction

It is the hope of the Link for Learning team that this booklet will serve as a "how-to" manual for those who would use it. It is formatted to include historical and background information which is followed by a step-by-step approach to the development of a parent education project. It is accompanied by a materials packet which includes examples of items that have been used by the Hughes schools to implement the project. If you don't find the information that you need in the booklet and packet, we encourage you to contact us. We will be happy to discuss our experiences with you.

No single approach can possibly serve the needs of every district or every school. However, there are some principles and ideas that are applicable to most situations. Our desire is to provide you, the reader, with an insight into our efforts, both the great successes and the rousing failures, with the goal of helping you to create solutions in your own school district. We believe that your creativity toward parent involvement will, like ours, stretch as you ponder the possibilities. When we wonder what we, a small school district in eastern Arkansas might have to offer districts from all over our state and our nation, we can say at least that we've tried our ideas and found them useful. We know that if we can do it, you can, too!

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Description of the School and Community

The Hughes School District is located in eastern Arkansas and serves students from three counties. The majority of the district lies in St. Francis County, but students from both Crittenden and Lee Counties help to make up the school population. The district covers an area of approximately 247 square miles and is bounded by the Mississippi River on the east. The western boundary lies about halfway to Forrest City, the county seat. The northern boundary lies just beyond Interstate 40, and the southern boundary approaches the Lee County line. It is a consolidated district with its school sites located in the community of Hughes, which has a population of 1,810. About 68 percent of the 1,100 students are transported and 72 percent are eligible for free and reduced price lunches. There are two school sites, the elementary campus serving grades K-6 and the high school campus serving grades 7-12. The district employs 91 certified employees and 60 non-certified employees. It is the largest employer in the area.

The nearest metropolitan area to Hughes, Arkansas, is Memphis, Tennessee. This fact makes the community somewhat of a stepchild in terms of services in its home state. Arkansas Educational Television is not carried on the local television cable and cannot be picked up in the community without a special antenna. There is only one local publication, The Hughes Highlights, which links the school and community. It is a recently established paper which is published about once a month. Other papers are in Forrest City and West Memphis, both approximately 25 miles away. The district is rural and is considered isolated.

Once a bustling, thriving, agricultural community where large plantations employed many laborers, the community of Hughes and the entire school district now suffer from a weakened farm economy. Changes in agriculture have reduced the number of laborers needed, and few new businesses have developed to fill the gap.

According to the state report card, Hughes is 95 of 326 (now 324) districts in terms of student numbers, number 317 in terms of income, number 288 in education level of the community, and number 23 in terms of students on free and reduced lunches. St. Francis County is distinguished by having a high unemployment rate and a high teen pregnancy rate. It is one of thirteen counties in the state of Arkansas that has a per capita income of less than $9000. In the last decade there was an outmigration of the population related to personal income and job opportunity. Those who made up the bulk of the loss were the "most productive segments of the workforce" according to a report furnished to the Governor s Rural Development Action Committee for St. Francis County in 1988 and supported by a research summary published in the Arkansas Gazette in January of 1991. According to this recent report, many of the families left in the Delta region of eastern Arkansas are headed by a single female. Those leaving are the ones who are going to seek opportunity, leaving behind the young and the weak.

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Information related to parent involvement tells us that it is important to all children to have their parents involved, but it is particularly important to both parents and children in communities like the one described above. Parents whose resources are limited need the support of schools and communities to strengthen their endeavors at participation in their children's education. In the community of Hughes, what began tenuously as a summer program has grown and thrived as the successful project that is outlined in these pages.

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Growth and Development of the Link for Learning Project

When in 1988 a sub-committee of educators was formed to provide recommendations to the Governor's Rural Development Action Committee for St. Francis County, their first recommendation dealt with providing comprehensive services in pre-school education, day care, and parenting skills. The committee noted that the only way to address the needs of our children in the schools would be to address the needs of the family in relation to school and to address the cycle of poverty that withholds necessary parental support from our children.

As a participant on the committee and as preparer of the sub-committee report, the Link for Learning project coordinator discovered that the information gathered was not unfamiliar. Having spent fifteen years in the classroom beginning with teaching in first grade in 1963 in Memphis, Tennessee, and continuing in several Delta school districts she had learned by experience that parents are an integral part of the instructional process. Beyond that the experience of the superintendent and that of the Chapter I staff (which accumulates to over 200 years) provided the understanding that the school cannot be successful apart from the home. It was a relief to know that there was evidence of the need and growing support for encouraging parents to increase their knowledge of and involvement in children's education. When the sub-committee's report and the full report were filed away in the local district, it was believed that there would be a time to make use of the information contained therein.

In the winter of 1989, it became apparent that the state office of Chapter I was interested in funding parent involvement activities in the local schools. It also became known that innovative projects could be funded and would have some flexibility not available in regular projects. At about the same time a program was aired on educational television showing a parent education program in a housing project in which a room was set aside for teaching parents how to interact with their children in ways that fostered learning. This was the light bulb that gave substance to Chapter I's leading. We in the Hughes School District could do a similar kind of activity.

For the first time, in the spring of 1989, our school submitted a pre-kindergarten summer school project to Chapter I, and we attached a component for parent education. It consisted of three meetings with parents which proved to be very successful and rewarding for both teachers and parents. Our first program included having a kindergarten teacher model sharing the book, The Three Pigs. The teacher read to those parents just as she would to children, giving voice to the characters and showing the pictures. Our fear was that the parents would be offended, but that was not the case. They became engrossed in the story and listened intently as we suggested that the quality time between parent and child and the love of books and reading that could come from sharing books (even if they just talked about the pictures) could lay a foundation for children's success in school. At the end of the meeting, each parent was given a book to be shared with their children.

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In the fall of 1989, our Chapter I project included an innovative activity for a parent education program. We held six meetings at the elementary school, giving incentives to children if their parents attended, providing incentives to classrooms for attendance, featuring Chapter I children on the program, and opening classrooms for visitation with both regular and Chapter I teachers. Attendance was outstanding with 47% of our elementary Chapter I children being represented by a parent for at least one meeting during the school year.

For the current project, we have extended the parent education component into the high school and have held two meetings, one to highlight reading and one to highlight math. Although our success did not equal the high percentages of attendance that we have had at the elementary level, we do not plan to give up. We will seek creative ways to provide information that parents need. We know that can be done, because we recently had 131 people attend a Drug Free Schools meeting for parents on our high school campus.

At the elementary school, our parent attendance during the current year has been outstanding. As of our February meeting, we have had 56% of our elementary Chapter I children represented by a parent for at least one meeting. Our total representation for Chapter I children in grades K-12 as of February was 42%. Many of our parents seldom miss a meeting, and their response when we ask about the the need to continue is very positive.

Our rewards through the Link for Learning project have been varied. Recently one of our counselors told the program coordinator that she sees a new pride in our children because of their parents' interest. When one looks out over the audience at a meeting, one sees parents whose faces are bright with awareness of their importance to their children's education. And less important, but also pleasing, is the positive recognition that has come to our program and to our schools. We were featured last year in the Arkansas Education Showcase. Arkansas Educational Television came to spend the day with us and to film a parent meeting which was featured on their "Spotlight on Education." We were recommended by our state and selected by the National Association of State Chapter I Coordinators to present at the International Reading Association's National Conference in Las Vegas, Nevada, in the spring of 1991. And, most recently, we have been notified that we are the recipients of one of five State Recognition Grants for the 1991-92 school year. The purpose of the grant is to disseminate information across our state about our project.

There is a great deal of work related to a formalized parent involvement project. Some of that will be outlined on the pages that follow. Remember, though, that in spite of the work, there are a lot of people and many organizations who support parenting projects. This is one area in which schools will be swimming with the current. There are many ways to develop a project and many ways to fund it. Those of us who have a little experience would be happy to help in any way that we can. This is not new ground. In our local project we have learned many "tricks" to help with program management. If you would like to

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know more than what you hear at a presentation or read in the material provided, call or write the address in the front of this booklet. The program coordinator will try to answer your questions. There are likely many educators in other projects who would say the same thing.

We are fortunate to be in education at a time when there is the great amount of networking going on that exists now. Our colleagues in the state of Arkansas and those of us at Hughes are fortunate to share in a cooperative spirit of helping one another to get the job done that extends from the Arkansas Department of Education and continues between districts and into the local schools. All of us are moving together toward the goal of providing quality and equity for all our children. Locally, we have received much help. If we can help someone else, we will be pleased.

Description of the Project

The Link for Learning Project is a parent involvement activity that has as its goal the creation of a network of support for Chapter I children that includes the Chapter I teacher, the regular teacher, and the parent. It began without a name in the summer school portion of the Hughes School District's Chapter I project in the summer of 1989. Initially it included only three meetings held at night during the five-week summer term for pre-kindergarten. During the current fiscal year, it consists of six nighttime meetings at Hughes Elementary School, two similar meetings at Hughes High School, four daytime meetings related to an innovative project in second grade, one service project held in the fall, one make-and-take workshop held in December, three meetings connected to the planned summer school, and two make-and-take workshops planned for the summer.

The project is funded by Chapter I at an approximate cost of $22.00 per Chapter I student for the project year. The budget includes stipends and benefits paid to both regular and Chapter I teachers and administrators who are serving in activities not required by their regular contracts. Refreshments are furnished for meetings, incentives are provided to stimulate attendance, and items are provided for dissemination of information and publicity. Materials have been purchased which can be used as resources for the lessons and can be used by parents to learn more about how to help their children. Equipment bought for the project serves the dual purpose of supporting instructional activities in Chapter I classes and supporting parent education.

The regular monthly meetings held at the elementary school on the last Monday night of each month in September, October, November, January, February, and April are held at 6:30 in the evening. This was the overwhelming choice of scheduling as indicated by surveys sent to parents. In order to accommodate the few who asked for alternate scheduling, the program was extended in the current year to the high school and to include daytime meetings. Planning sessions are held with the teachers who are scheduled to participate in a given meeting a few weeks prior to the meeting with written instructions handed to each participant. A calendar of events is passed out each August to all the faculty and staff involved listing all the planning sessions and meetings. Minor adjustments to the calendar are made during the year. At the first parent meeting of the year, meeting calendars are handed to parents.

A typical agenda for one of the night meetings would include having the parent register for each child that he/she represents, sign a ticket for each teacher whose class is being represented, and this year signing a ribbon link (a piece of satin ribbon that is being joined into a chain to symbolize all the "links" in the program). After going through the refreshment line, the parent would be seated for the program which would begin with introductions and be followed by a "lesson" and some kind of Chapter I student recognition. After the program, there is usually classroom visitation and fellowship around

the refreshment table. Meetings that begin at 6:30 are usually over shortly after 8:00.

Students who are not on the program are not invited, but if they come, they are allowed to have refreshments and to sit through the program. Because of the large number of children represented by the parents who attend a single meeting, we have not addressed child care before now. It is conceivable that if we invited children, we would have more children at a meeting than we could manage. The lack of child care services has not been a problem for us to date.

After the first full year of the innovative project for parent education, Chapter I student achievement showed an aggregate gain of 4.55 NCE's in the basic skill portion of the reading project and 11 NCE's in the math project. All the children in the early childhood project showed a gain in the number of skills mastered. We cannot directly link all the gain in achievement to parent involvement, but we have no doubt that it had a bearing. The current project is expected to continue to impact the achievement of the students in significant ways.

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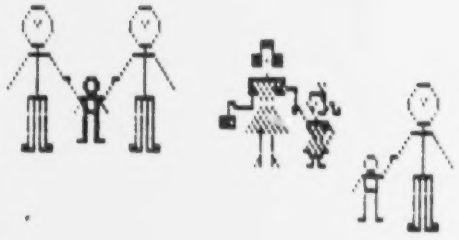
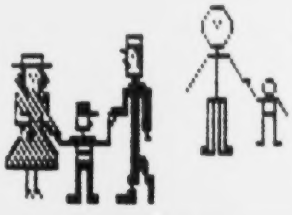
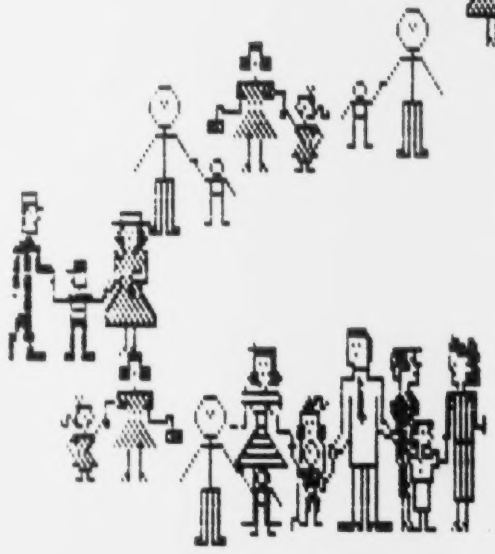


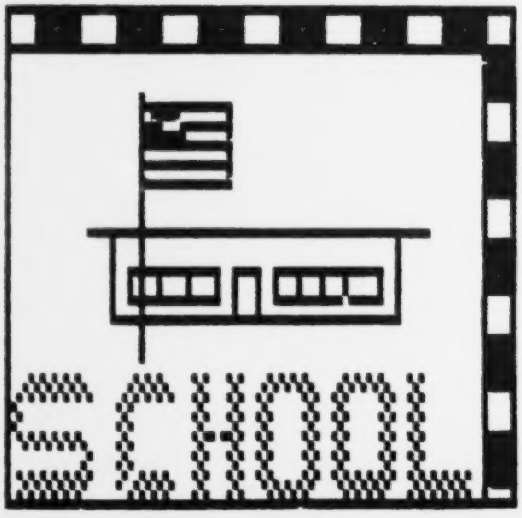
Putting Together

a Parent Education Project

Step by Step







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STEP
ONE

STEP ONE - ASSESSING YOUR RESOUCES

Philosophy

One of the things that is clear from the effective schools research and that is learned from experience is that accomplishment which is to be lasting must grow from a philosophy that supports the activities necessary to bring about that accomplishment. In a district or a school where the stated philosophy and mission support parent involvement, there is a basis for the practice of involving parents. Experience would suggest that a project should not be initiated to reach beyond the bounds of its philosophical support. In other words, "If no one in your school other than you believes in parent involvement, then start with the parents to whom you have direct access and responsibility and build from there." If good things come of your initial project, you have a base from which to extend your philosophy. Start at a comfortable size and increase support. Your resources begin with a belief in what you are doing. The broader the philosophical base, the greater your chance for success. Philosophies can be cultivated. Like a farmer planting a seed, a believer can plant an idea, nurture it, display its fruit, and reap the benefits. If you are not ready to go beyond the step of philosophy, start now and plant that seed!

A philosophy is often established through experience. As stated in the section entitled "Growth and Development of Link for Learning," our project is based on information and experience which causes us to believe that parent involvement is important. Several years ago when we were first told about the required annual comprehensive needs assessment for Chapter I programs, our district developed a philosophy statement for compensatory education programs. This later became our mission. In that mission there is a statement that supports parent involvement. Copies of our district philosophy statement, our mission statement, and our compensatory education mission statement are included in the packet that accompanies this booklet. Our schools are in the process of developing their mission statements at this time.

Not only is our district on record as believing in the importance of parent involvement, our administrators, from the superintendent to the school level, believe in and support parent involvement. Before our project was drafted, there was a commitment given by the superintendent and the principals that the project would be supported in the schools. Beyond this support, when we began our program we had on record results from perception surveys that indicated that every segment of our population--parents, teachers, students, and community members--believed that this was an idea whose time had come. In the spring of 1989, every group surveyed listed parent involvement as an area for concern.

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Leadership

There is the leadership that is given indirectly to a project through permission granted to proceed and through philosophical and professional support. There is also the direct leadership that gets a job done. Both of the above are absolutely necessary for the success of a formalized parent education program. In our district, the indirect leadership has been given lavishly by our superintendent and the direct leadership by a project coordinator.

A project such as Link for Learning requires a vast amount of work and planning. If there is not an individual willing to take on the responsibility of planning and carrying out activities on a day-to-day basis, there cannot be a successful project. For those of you considering the development of a formalized parent education project, it would not be an exaggerated statement to say to those in authority, "Do not begin unless you are willing to set aside time for a project coordinator to do his or her job." The project coordinator in our project is spending an estimated fifteen hours per meeting in administration, management, and record-keeping. That person must be able to organize, to plan, to improvise, and to create. He or she must believe in the project whole-heartedly and must have stamina.

General Norman Schwarzkopf recently made a statement in a news conference that attributed the success of the allied troops in the Persian Gulf to President George Bush's understanding of the concept of shared leadership. It is a fact that leadership multiplies when it is spread among the participants in a project. The school-level administrators and the teachers, particularly Chapter I teachers and their aides, along with the Parent Partner in this project, have provided the kind of leadership that cannot come from one or two people. Each member of the Chapter I staff has been willing to share responsibility for making Link for Learning a success in a variety of ways. Without shared leadership, it would be very difficult to maintain the number of ongoing activities that are required.

Ideas and Information

There are many sources for ideas and information for parent involvement. Ideas flow into the schools through the mail every day. Many advertisements contain hints and bits of information. There are a number of commercial programs that include outstanding materials. Two of our sources of ideas have been the book Megaskills and materials from Webster's International (See the list of sources.) With Megaskills in hand, it is possible to develop a whole year's lessons to present to parents.

Periodicals such as Parent's magazine and the local newspaper provide many ideas on which programs can be based. Once the newspaper ran a series of articles on discipline contributed by the mental health center. With a bit of adaptation, these articles became the core of a very popular presentation.

Information that has been very helpful to us in developing rationale has come from the Resource Notebook for Effective Schools Research developed by the Arkansas Department of Education and from Shelli Billig at the Rural Technical Assistance Center in Denver, Colorado. The material sent to us from the TAC is public domain and can be copied as needed.

The first year our theme was "Teaching our Children to Say, I Can." We talked about self-esteem and confidence-building. We painted eyes on a big yellow can from the cafeteria and we lugged that "eye-can" everywhere. We used it for drawings, we pointed to it, and we made it stand for a concept.

This year we adopted our name, Link for Learning, and we developed a logo. We use the chain theme and the link theme in many ways. One saying that has been meaningful is, "Join hands and hearts for the children." The name of the game is symbolic leadership. It gives a project exposure and makes its goals known.

For next year, we are considering a theme tied to clocks and a message, "Give time to the children." After all, we are told that the goal we should always keep in mind is not that we are working to get parents to the school, but that we are working to get parents to spend time supporting their children's educational endeavors.

People

Who will work with you? Who would volunteer their time and energy? Who can you actually count on to get the job done? It's very important that you assess realistically your resources in terms of people. In our project, we have been fortunate in that we have been able to provide stipends to the staff members who work at night or outside their contracted time to support the parent education project. There is no way that we can pay people enough for their time, but we can express our appreciation for the fact that their time away from their families and personal pursuits is valuable.

Time

Time must be set aside for the duties of the project coordinator and the staff members who participate. There are several responsibilities that must be carried out. From the drafting of the project to developing a calendar of events, assignment of tasks, setting up for a meeting, holding a meeting, and documenting the activities, there are many hours of work involved. It would be wise to begin with a calendar that is manageable and to let it grow with experience, because every scheduled activity multiplies the amount of time required in a project.

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Facilities

Facilities must be assessed as a part of planning, but there are creative ways to approach parent involvement. Work with whatever facilities are available to reach parents in flexible grouping arrangements.

Funds

Funds are the necessary evil in any project. Like facilities, you can t do without them, but you can be inventive to make the supply fulfill the demand. Discover all the sources of funding that are available in your state from federal and state government, from the business community, and from private sources. Start with whatever information you have. A good place to begin is with your state department of education s information telephone number or your SDE telephone directory. Use the list of sources available in this booklet. Contact R-TAC in Denver. Use ERIC. Every time you talk with anyone get a lead for another contact. Keep a file of all the possible sources. Initially, you ll have to limit your activities to what you can support from available funding, but as you gain experience, you'll gain confidence for soliciting funds and knowledge of sources.

Our Link for Learning project is funded through Chapter I, but in our district, because of our ever-expanding parent involvement program, we have had meetings funded by other sources. Our state mandates that two contract days be set aside for teachers to hold parent conferences. The district supports activities for parent education such as orientation for parents of new kindergarten, seventh, and ninth grade students. It provides for activities related to parent education that are held through the counselors' offices such as financial aid workshops and college and career nights for students and their parents. This year we held two parent education meetings using Drug Free Schools funds, and we are continually alert to opportunities and means of meeting parent needs through other sources that may come our way.

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STEP
TWO

STEP TWO - SHOWING THE NEED

To conduct a needs assessment can mean many things. In the state of Arkansas, our state Standards for Accreditation require a self-evaluation every five years that is a comprehensive outcomes evaluation. The self-evaluation begins with identifying needs and ends with an improvement plan. Each year, we evaluate our progress in the schools and develop a set of annual goals for each school. The needs assessment process is not unfamiliar to us. However, we hear the term "needs assessment" in many different contexts to the extent that we, as educators, might begin to think of conducting a needs assessment as just more red tape to be accomplished in the shortest time and with the least thought possible. The person or school who truly understands the purpose of a needs assessment and cultivates the skill of conducting a meaningful one in an efficient way obtains a tool that serves a very useful purpose.

In 1989, after the governor's county committee had published its report and the Federal Coordinator's Winter Conference in our state had furnished new information on parent involvement, we conducted our annual Chapter I needs assessment in our district and received overwhelming response to questions about parent involvement. Armed with the justification from our local surveys, the information from the conference, and verification from the county committee report, we had the necessary evidence of need in our schools, and we could be confident that we had the support of our patrons.

We in Hughes had begun the process by which the Chapter I needs assessment activities became organized and regular in our district after our federal coordinator attended a workshop presented in our state by Shelli Billig of R-TAC. Our needs assessment plan is a local adaptation of the plan that was outlined in that workshop. With the exception of perception surveys, all the information in the plan is available in our district in various offices. We keep our surveys simple and to the point. By doing so, we can show support for the activities in our application for our Chapter I project without burdening ourselves unnecessarily. A copy of our plan, a narrative summary of our last year's findings, and a sample of the survey used in the spring of 1991 are included in the presentation packet. More information is available from R-TAC and, in Arkansas, from the state's Chapter I office. (See the list of sources.)

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STEP THREE - DEVELOPING A RATIONALE

Once you have a reasonably accurate assessment of your resources and you can demonstrate the need for a parent involvement project, developing a rationale is simply a matter organizing your findings and balancing your resources to meet your need. You must be able to formulate a problem and communicate a logical solution.

Our rationale was based on the resources of commitment from key people, commitment from the Chapter I office at the Arkansas Department of Education, funds in our Chapter I grant adequate for the project, and evidence of need as shown in our needs assessment. It was supported, as well, from the standpoint of research through data gathered outside our district and provided to us from several sources. One of the most comprehensive bodies of information that we have came from R-TAC through Shelli Billig. Some of the information sent to us is included in the related packet.

A structure for our rationale was developed through discussion with local administrators and teachers and through consultation with our Chapter I advisor, who was at that time Jo Cheek. Deliberating over our needs and the resources available to meet them allowed us to begin the formalization of a plan.

The plan first took the form of an addition to our pre-kindergarten summer school project in the summer of 1989. At the same time the summer program was being implemented, the Chapter I application for Fy'90 was written to include a year-long innovative project for parent education. The rationale for this project stated, "The Hughes School District is in an area of the state that has suffered economic decline. There are more and more poor people here. Many parents have limited resources and limited knowledge of how to help their children. It is difficult to get parent participation in the instructional process. In reviewing the results of last year's evaluation it is apparent that the students need more support than in the past to achieve. In the needs assessment done in the spring all segments surveyed indicated belief that a parent education project was needed."

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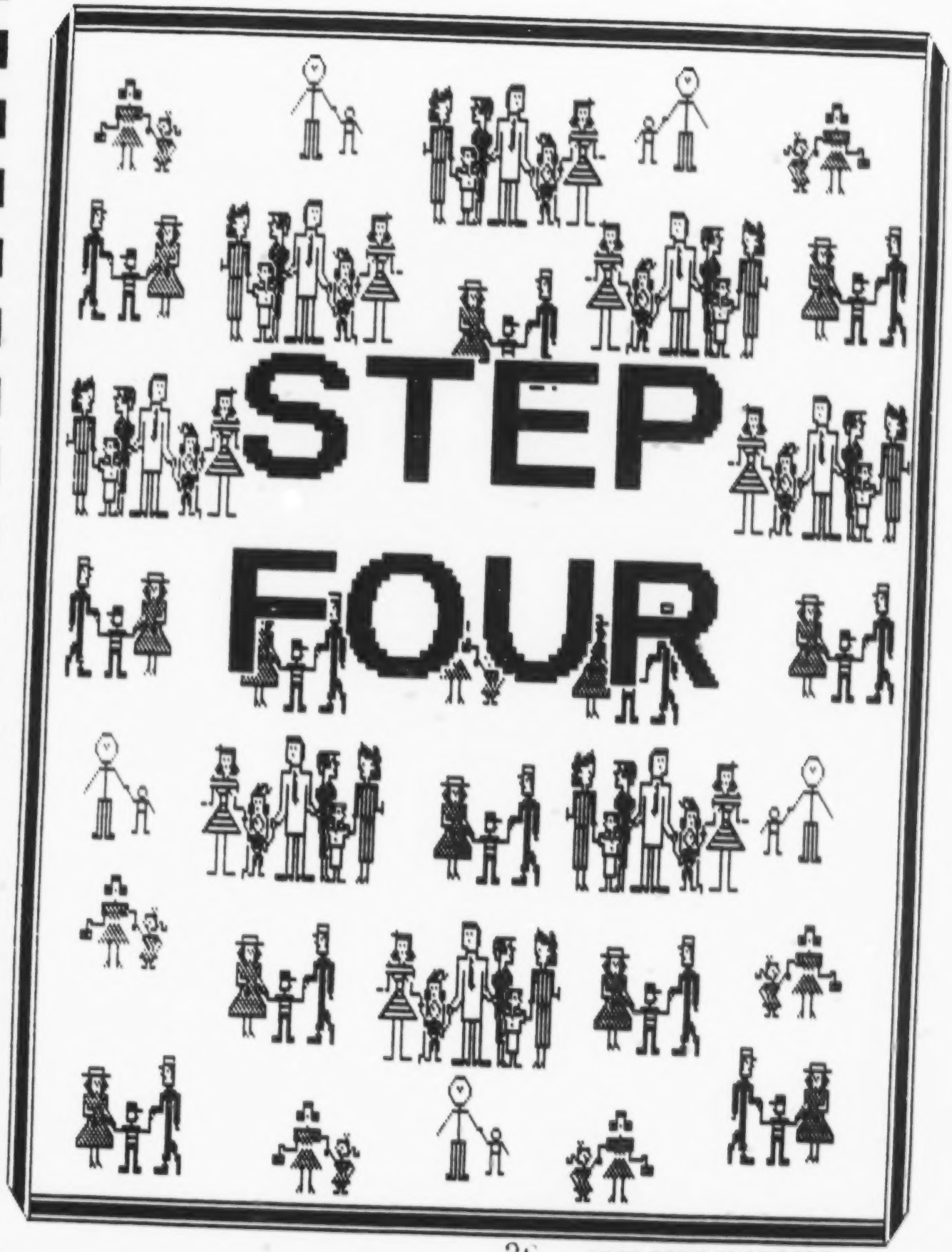

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STEP FOUR - PLANNING THE PROJECT

At the point when it is time to actually plan a project, several important factors should already be in place. The project director should already know if he/she has the support of those with authority over the program, who will be expected to carry out the activities of the project (by title, if not by name), where the activities will be held, what will be the source of funds, and which needs are to be met. These factors will determine the size and scope of the project.

In our Chapter I project, Link for Learning, the planning was first formally set to paper through the application process. Because that is a very structured process which is a requirement for receiving funds, there was no question as to the components which would be included. The rationale, a budget, and a narrative description of the project were required in the application. The program was funded as an innovative project within the Chapter I application. This amount of planning, however, was not sufficient for the entire activity. It was only a beginning phase.

Whether or not a school must go through an application process before implementing a parent education project, it must determine what it is that it wants to do and how it will be done. Writing a simple narrative to describe what you are trying to achieve and listing your resources (funds, personnel, etc.) is a practical approach. Once this is done, you can begin to make a plan. That means deciding how many meetings there will be, where and when they will be held, who will participate in them, what tasks and responsibilities are involved, and what will be the order for the necessary actions. Developing a plan means asking, "What comes first?" and continuing the questions until you have an outline for the activities that must take place.

When the workers in a project are to be paid, budget considerations determine the number of people to be assigned to work at each meeting. In this aspect, and in all other aspects of the project, planning for the year must take into consideration the limitations that will be made by the available resources. Funds and personnel, after philosophical support, are, perhaps, the most restrictive factors in a parent education project. While there is some room to adjust for a lack of either, both are needed for a successful project.

Once the project in Hughes was approved by Chapter I, a budget and a general plan were already in place. It was time for detailed planning to begin. Initially it was determined that the project would serve grades K-6 and that the meetings would be held at the elementary school. A calendar of events was developed that included a meeting each month and a planning session for every meeting. Decisions were made concerning who would attend each planning session and each parent education meeting.

After the calendar was established, it had to be communicated. The first year it was handed to all administrators. By the second year, it was known that a calendar needed to go to everyone involved on

each campus. A meeting calendar was given to each parent who attended the first meeting of the year. This calendar stated meeting dates, times, places, and focus (which grades were to be highlighted). The calendar of events was a separate calendar which was given to teachers and administrators. It told them about the meetings, but it also told who was to attend planning sessions, when they were to occur, and where they would be held. By establishing a calendar before the school year started and not changing dates or times of meetings (the last Monday of each month at 6:30 P.M.), the plan has resulted in a beneficial habit. Parent education is not a haphazard activity. It is an established program.

One of the very first decisions that was made in the initial project (and one that has proven to be a good one) is that our parents would never leave a parent education meeting without something in their hands to share with their children. As stated earlier in this booklet, we began by giving a book to share. Since then many different things have been given to parents. They have received bookmarks, self-esteem badges, motivational pencils, activity sheets, and many other items when they have come to meetings. Planning was necessary to determine the purposes to be met with these items and to provide for their acquisition.

If refreshments are to be served, arrangements must be made. The workers in Hughes did not understand the importance of refreshments in the beginning, but we soon learned. Our parents, if they were employed outside the home, were hungry and tired at 6:30. If they were not, they saw the refreshment table as a pleasant social gathering place. We failed to serve refreshments at only one meeting. The response told us that we had made a mistake. "Food, fun, and favors" need to be considered in planning.

Determining the source of lessons and materials to be used for imparting information to parents can be a worry. Our approach to this concern has been to have in mind a series of lessons for the year and a theme on which to base our activities before the year begins. The first year, the book Megatrends provided information to be made into lessons for several of our meetings. This book and the theme of self-esteem and confidence, "Teaching our children to say 'I can,'" provided a security blanket on which to rely as the year unfolded. This year, program planners have been able to draw on the experiences of the previous year and the project's name for ideas. There are many ways to use the symbols, "link" and "chain." Eventually, more ideas for programs and lessons have developed than there have been meetings in which to use them. However, when the program coordinator is a busy person with many other responsibilities, having tentative arrangements for programs made early is a very helpful practice.

Program planning means providing an agenda in advance of each meeting to those who will be responsible. Because the Link for Learning project is designed to create a network between the regular program, the Chapter I program, and the home, it has included all these components in each meeting. Careful thought has been necessary to link the three components and coordinate their activities. The program's

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agendas have included speakers with messages targeted toward the needs of Chapter I children, provided school information that Chapter I parents need to know, and spotlighted Chapter I children through presentations and demonstrations. Each meeting has included a visitation time to create opportunities for parents to visit in both regular and Chapter I classrooms. Teachers from both programs have participated in the meetings and have been given copies of the agenda during planning sessions.

To prepare for evaluation and documentation of a project the program planner must determine the means that will be used. In the project outlined on these pages, several kinds of documentation are required. Evaluation is taken from that documentation. Naturally, fiscal accounting is necessary. There are many different systems that can be used. In Arkansas, Handbook II is currently being used. It will soon be replaced by Handbook II R. The guidelines set forth in the state's Chapter I policy manual are also being used. This manual interprets the federal regulations that govern the project. Program accounting provides for a record-keeping system that documents activities. A folder is kept for each meeting. It includes a copy of the agenda, the instructions from each planning meeting, a register of workers for each meeting, communications related to each meeting, parent attendance, and a correlation between each Chapter I child and the adults who have represented that child at meetings. The information from these records allows the project coordinator to meet the requirements of the evaluation design.

A checklist for planning a parent education project should include but not be limited to the following items:

1. Assess resources
2. Determine needs
3. State a purpose
4. Gather support
5. Consult with others
6. Develop a description
7. Develop a budget
8. Develop a calendar of events
9. List activities
10. Name personnel
11. Create agendas
12. Finalize date, place, and time
13. Select materials and equipment
14. Assign responsibilities
15. Generate instructions
16. Communicate with participants
17. Provide evaluation

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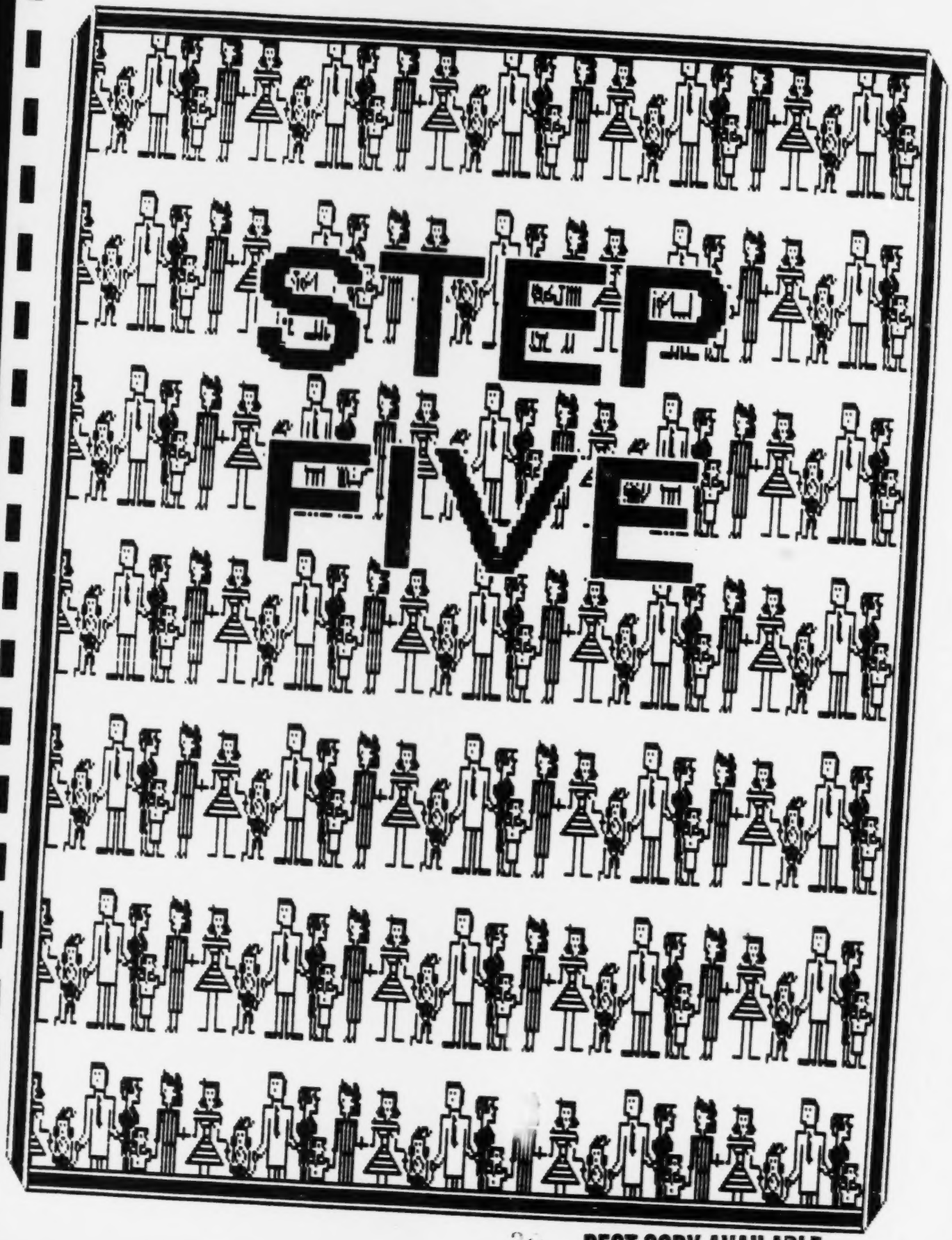

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STEP FIVE - IMPLEMENTING THE PROJECT

In regard to Link for Learning, the project application is written each spring for the program that will begin in August and continue until the end of the following summer's pre-kindergarten program. The first formal activity held to prepare for the application is a needs assessment conducted through the local Chapter I project in the late winter and early spring prior to the application's being developed. As a part of the planning process, meetings are held to gather input from teachers, parents, counselors, and librarians. The completed application is submitted to the Chapter I office at the state level in June.

Once the project has been approved and the year's planning has been done, it is time to put the overall plan into action and to address the details necessary for holding each meeting. Using the calendar of events to guide the activities of the project is like using mile markers on the highway or hours on the clock. It allows you to know where you are at any given time and to prepare for the next step. Some preparations, such as engaging special speakers or ordering materials, must be made several months before a meeting takes place. Other actions must be taken only one meeting at a time. The preparation for each meeting generates the bulk of the work related to a parent education project. In the next few pages, this narrative will describe some of that work.

The first parent education meeting of each year in Link for Learning is usually held on the last Monday night in September. Prior to the meeting the coordinator must have taken several preparatory steps. There must have been arrangements made with the principal to finalize meeting plans. There must have been communication to the faculty and staff revealing meeting dates and the responsibility of each participant to attend those meetings. The coordinator must have prepared an agenda and instructions for the initial planning session and must have made sure that all the participants know to be present. The program and lesson must have been planned and arrangements must have been made for speakers and classes that might be on the program. Provisions must have been made for any materials that might be needed for attendance incentives, presentations to parents, or use in the program. A planning session must have been held. Arrangements must have been made for refreshments. Rolls of children's names must have been prepared to allow for a correlation between Chapter I children and the attendance of the adults who represent them. A registration form or time sheet must have been prepared for workers. Publicity must have been disseminated. Parents and teachers must have been invited. The meeting place must have been prepared, and all supplies (rolls, props, incentives, refreshments, etc.) must have been delivered to the meeting site.

During a meeting, it is important to make parents feel comfortable and welcome and to communicate the messages that need to be communicated. Each school must judge which messages are appropriate in its own situation. In Link for Learning we have come to understand the

value of symbolic leadership. Our people respond to themes and visuals such as the ribbon chain described earlier. During the current year, each time a parent or grandparent comes to a meeting, he or she signs a piece of satin ribbon which we then use to form a link in our chain. Every meeting is represented by a different color of ribbon. When that chain with all its signatures is stretched before the group, parents know that they have contributed to the "link" between home and school.

An effort has been made by the staff in Hughes to concretely equate parent participation with events that occur in the parent education project. An example would be one of the means that is used to keep classrooms and teachers interested in promoting attendance at meetings. The incentive is to hold drawings and give prizes for attendance. The prize may go to the parent or to a parent's child s classroom. To carry out this activity, we have each parent sign the back of a ticket that has the teacher's name on the front. When we draw out a ticket, we say "Mrs. Jones's class wins a prize because Mrs. Smith is here tonight." In this way the parent is recognized for contributing the time to attend a meeting. Another example would be when a classroom receives an incentive such as a coke party because it had the most parents in attendance at a meeting. The announcement of which class won and how many parents attended for a class helps to increase interest and to show parents that they can make a difference. There are many other ways to create incentive and to build interest. The creative coordinator and a creative staff will not lack for ideas. It is important that there be a balance of both familiarity and variety in the activities of the project.

Another part of our program that has proven to be popular with parents and to make them feel welcome is the refreshment table. We have a staff member who serves as the Parent Partner in the project and who has assumed responsibility for having refreshments at each meeting. This person acts as a liaison between the school and the community. She encourages attendance at meetings throughout both school and community by working with parents of our students and by engaging in activities with churches and civic groups. Our project has benefitted from having such a person as our Parent Partner because she is familiar with and to the parents and has a long record of service to them. The fact that she is a capable and willing hostess at meetings makes serving refreshments a task that is manageable.

Meeting topics or lessons can be planned without specificity before the beginning of the year. During the first year, as stated earlier, our lessons were built around the topic of self-esteem. The broad lesson was that confidence, persistence, and effort could be nurtured in children. An important message to parents was that they are their children's first and most important teachers. Because many of these "teachers" needed help with their own self-esteem, our first program was about how each of us has self assessments that are the product of the messages that have been given to us by others. Our speaker demonstrated how self-esteem is eaten away through children's experiences with others. Knowing that each of us grows in our own eyes when we can contribute, the supporters of Link for Learning believe that the self-esteem of our parents, in addition to that of our

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children, has grown because of the parents' participation in the project.

There is a wealth of information available on which to build lessons for parent education projects. The project coordinator must sift through the information at his or her disposal and select that which is suited to the project in which it will be used. What is right for one school's parents will not necessarily be right for another's. The messages that need to be communicated in one situation might be totally inappropriate in a situation that is different. The key to deciding the content of each meeting is to know the parents being served and to select information and delivery systems that fit their needs.

It is said that educators must remember that the first goal of parent involvement should be to get parents involved in spending time with their children rather than to get them to spend time at school. This truth should be held as a plumbline or compass for all decisions made in a project. The lessons should encourage parents to participate in their children's education by helping them to know ways that they can. The activities should build incentive for parents to improve their parenting skills and should help them to feel that they have something to contribute in their children's learning experiences. Parents should be helped to value their contributions to their children's success and to take responsibility for supporting their children's efforts. They should be relieved of their often overwhelming sense of helplessness to make a difference in their children's education.

One way to increase the parents' sense of control over their children's achievement in school is to explain to them how they contribute to achievement through the guidance and aid that they give to children each day as they provide good nutrition, rest, opportunity to study, emotional support, love, and evidence of worth. Another way is to show them through demonstrations, presentations, and classroom visitations what their children do at school. Often parents are afraid to talk to teachers because they are intimidated by what they perceive as the teacher's superiority in matters related to teaching and learning. Helping parents to understand that they are respected partners in the process of educating their children promotes their willingness to share in the responsibility.

Time and situations in which parents can observe what is going on at school and talk with teachers about ways to contribute must be planned into each meeting. Open communication does not happen just because the opportunity is given. Teachers must learn to take the initiative in developing communication and must be sensitive to parent responses. Building lines of communication and keeping them active requires concerted effort. The quality and the quantity of communication that takes place depends on the deliberate intent planned into the project to have two-way communication cultivated by the staff members involved. The burden of responsibility for maintaining communication lies with the school and its staff. When they make the

effort to reach out to parents in ways that show respect and concern, parents will respond.

When a project has a funding source outside the district, such as a federal or state grant, there are records that must be kept. Even when funding is local, there is the need to keep records for evaluation purposes. Because our project is federally funded, documentation is kept to fulfill the requirements of the evaluation design and to provide records for fiscal accountability. At each parent education meeting, a roll of workers (which they must sign) is kept for payroll purposes. Workers receive a small stipend for each meeting in which they participate and are paid twice a year for their services. The bookkeeper follows the direction of our auditor and the federal finance officer in our state in regard to payment of benefits, addendums to contracts, and generating of W-2's that include these stipends. Records of attendance are kept with the signature of each adult who represents a child by each child's name. We measure attendance in terms of the number of Chapter I children who were represented by a parent at each meeting. In order to do this, the coordinator must provide a roll of each class with a place for the parent to sign for every meeting. Instructions are given to the teachers in advance to tell them how to register the parents. At the end of the year, an evaluation report is filed with the Chapter I office at the Arkansas Department of Education.

There are many ways to evaluate a project. Each project planner must decide what requirements must be met in an evaluation design. In our formal evaluation, numbers, percentages, and student achievement are measured. Perhaps, however, the most significant evaluation comes in the statements made by parents when they tell their feelings or write their comments on our survey forms each spring. One of the slogans used in our project encourages everyone to "join hands and hearts for the children." It would seem that the bridge is being made when the surveys are returned with statements such as the one by a parent who says that he or she is learning "...to be patient with my kids and take more time to listen..." and "...it helps me more than I can explain."

Another parent said, "I think knowing what is going on with our children and how to help them keeps parents feeling they are a part of the system. The information provided gives me a very good reason for helping..." and shows "...how to help at home."

Beginning with an idea in the mind of a dreamer and ending with an evaluation that documents the product of that idea, there are many steps that must be taken to plan and implement any project. A project with the size and scope of Link for Learning requires attention to a magnitude of details. To list the necessary steps one must simply look at what it is you have set out to do and then think through all the details required to get the job done. Like an engineer or an architect blueprinting a great structure, a program developer must lay the plans for the project. He or she must then become the contractor who gathers the workers, their tools, and their materials for the job. And finally, to ensure that the structure meets the specifications of the

plan, he or she must provide for supervision and administration of every detail from start to finish in a timely and orderly fashion. With this step-by-step approach, a sound structure can be built that reaches from its firm foundation in philosophy to a successful program climate.

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A Step-by-Step Outline for Implementing a Project

I. Assess your Resources - Make a list of all the means on which you can rely for help.

   A. Do you have support?

   B. Who will provide leadership?

   C. Where will you get ideas?

   D. Who will work with you?

   E. Is there time for the job?

   F. What facilities will you use?

   G. Where will you get the funds?

II. Show the Need - Gather evidence to document the need.

   A. What does current research say about parent involvement?

   B. What does the staff say?

   C. What do the parents say?

   D. What do the students say?

III. Develop a Rationale - Balance needs with resources.

   A. What do you need to do?

   B. What resources do you have available to do it?

   C. Can you formulate a problem (need) and state a possible solution for it with the resources that you have?

IV. Plan the Project - Develop your ideas in writing or put them into a computer.

   A. How much of the need will you try to address with the available resources? How many schools? How many grades? How many meetings? How many parents? This is the scope and size.

   B. How much money is available for which purposes? This will be the budget.

   C. When will events occur? This will be the calendar of events.

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D. Who will do the work? This is the list of people who must be included in planning meetings.

E. Where will meetings be held? Check with the principal.

F. What and/or who will be the program? Start from general ideas and move to specifics.

G. What materials and/or equipment will be needed? Think ahead if it must be ordered.

II. Implement the Project - Turn your plans into action.

A. Have you provided for arrangements that must be made farther in advance than one meeting at a time? These might be the need to engage a speaker for a later meeting or purchase materials for a later date.

B. Have you listed all the details necessary for meeting your responsibilities related to the next meeting? Do your planning, then check off the details.

C. Have you made provision for the implementation of every detail on your list? The coordinator must assign responsibilities, communicate the assignments, give instructions, etc. A checklist of some of the details follows on the next page.

A Checklist for Holding One Meeting

1. Check the details with the school principal.
2. Engage the speaker.
3. Order the materials.
4. Plan the planning session.
5. Plan the agenda.
6. Develop instructions for participants.
7. Develop a roll of workers and rolls of students.
8. Notify participants.
9. Hold the planning meeting.
10. Get out publicity.
11. Provide for preparation of the meeting place.
12. Provide for the materials, refreshments, and other items needed during the meeting.
13. Notify the parents about the meeting.
14. Notify all the teachers and administrators.
15. Hold the meeting.
16. Collect the materials from the meeting.
17. Do follow-up publicity.
18. Document attendance.
19. Do fiscal record-keeping and arrange for payments.
20. Maintain evaluation records.

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HELP!

A LIST OF HELPFUL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The following list provides addresses where help is available and a list of vendors for materials that have been useful in our program. Perhaps they will be useful to you, also. It is not a long list, but it is a beginning. There are many, many other sources of help. Just begin and take one step at a time.

Addresses

Arkansas Department of Education

Deborah McAfee, Coordinator
APPLE Program (Arkansas Parents: Partners in Learning Experiences)
Room 404-A
Arkansas Department of Education
4 State Capitol Mall
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201
(501) 682-4241

Howard Wallace, PAC Advisor
Chapter I Office, Room 202-B
Arkansas Department of Education
4 State Capitol Mall
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201
(501) 682-4565

Bernadine Hoffman, Effective Schools
Chapter II Office, Room 204-B
Arkansas Department of Education
4 State Capitol Mall
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201
(501) 682-4278

Rural Technical Assistance Center

Shelli Billig, Director Region 5 R-TAC
RMC Research Corporation
Writer Square, Suite 540
1512 Larimer Street
Denver, Colorado 80202
1-800-922-3636
(303) 825-3636

Vendors for Books and Materials

Better Teaching, Tips and Techniques to Improve Student Learning
(A periodical newsletter with good ideas)
The National School Public Relations Association
Suite #201
1501 Lee Highway
Arlington, Virginia 22209
(703) 528-5840
FAX (703) 528-7017

Bowdoin Materials (A beautifully prepared set of materials)
Manuals and Video - "How to Help Your Child Learn"
Webster s International, Inc.
5729 Cloverland Place
Brentwood, Tennessee 37027

Getting Involved, Workshops for Parents
(A book by Ellen Frede)
High/Scope Press
Department 10
600 North River Street
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

Megaskills
(A book by Dorothy Rich)
The National School Public Relations Association
Suite #201
1501 Lee Highway
Arlington, Virginia 22209
(703) 528-5840
FAX (703) 528-7017

Students at Risk, Problems and Solutions
(An AASA critical issues report by Ben Brodinsky
with Katherine E. Keough - helps with building rationale)
American Association of School Administrators
1801 North Moore St.
Arlington, Virginia 22209-9988

The New Print Shop
(Computer software by Mike Silva and Brian Lee for preparing banners,
signs, certificates, invitations, etc.)
Broderbund Software, Inc.
17 Paul Drive
San Rafael, California 94903-2101

What s Working in Parent Involvement
(A periodical newsletter that s very useful)
P.O. Box 7474
Fairfax Station, Virginia 22039-7474
(703) 569-9842

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THANKS

Thanks, Lisa, for volunteering your time to proof many drafts of this booklet. Thanks to each administrator, teacher, aide, student, or parent who has participated in the Link for Learning project and to the teams who have presented its message.

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Need help with
parent involvement?

Like some tips for
improving participation?

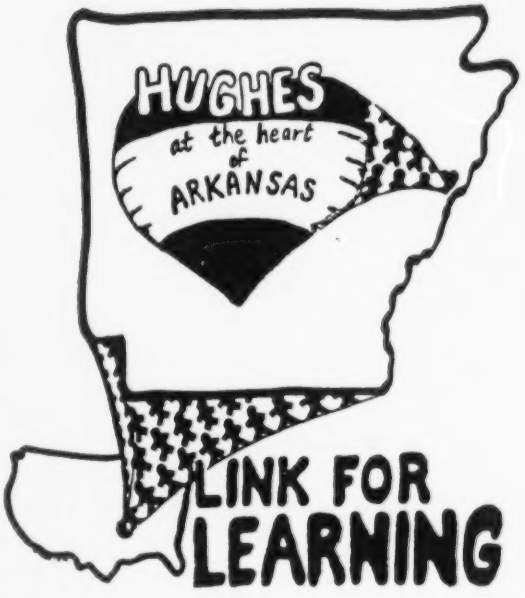
Would it help to know

_____ how to start?

_____ how to plan?

_____ how to implement?

A presentation that gives insight into answers for your questions can be tailored to fit your needs. Whether you are looking for an activity for your regular school program or a special project, help is available. Look inside for more details.



an
Arkansas State Recognition
Grant Dissemination
Project for
Parent Involvement Activities

Hughes Public Schools
P.O. Box 9
Hughes, Arkansas 72348
(501) 339-3430

Superintendent - Nelson Wall

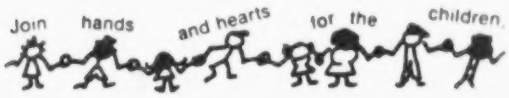
Link for Learning is a parent involvement project that was begun in the summer of 1989. Funded by Chapter I, its goal is to link the regular program, the Chapter I program, and the parent into a support network for Chapter I children. Its theories and practice, however, are applicable to any situation in which a school is seeking to develop a parent education component or to improve parent attendance at parent involvement activities.

HUGHES SCHOOLS

Recognition Received

Arkansas Education Showcase	89-90
Presenter at International Reading Association's National Conference	90-91
School Recognition Grant	91-92

Art work on front cover by Amanda Linn, Senior art education major at UCA, Conway



The **heart of the matter** is that schools and educational cooperatives in the state of Arkansas may access the funds available through this grant to pay cost of substitutes or stipends for teachers to attend dissemination presentations by calling the project coordinator to schedule a presentation.

A presentation might provide

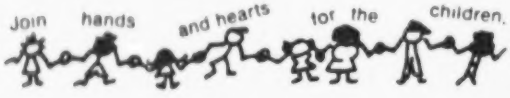
_____ an awareness activity for faculty, board, or parent groups

_____ a "how - to" workshop for program planners

_____ a consultation for those who are responsible for parent involvement

Proven Success

Parents surveyed express overwhelming support. Attendence records show that in the first year 47% of the children in the project were represented by a parent. In the current year, to date, 56% of elementary children and 42% district-wide have had parent(s) in attendance. As an extra benefit, attendence in all the district's parent involvement activities has improved along with student achievement scores. Chapter I children made significant gains in the first full year of the project.



Linda B. Estes, Federal Coordinator
Hughes Public Schools
P.O. Box 9
Hughes, Arkansas 72348